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ABSTRACT

The main topic of this paper is how the behavioral approach to counseling fulfills the requirements of an effective helping relationship. The role of the counselor is first considered, should the counselor exert influence over clients? In any interpersonal relationship, people influence and control one another, counseling relationships are no different. The basic issues of counseling are: (1) a counselor's right to intervene in the life of another; (2) the counselor's responsibility to do all he can to accomplish the goals set up for his client; and (3) the counselor's right to a role which is appropriate for each client, rather than being the same for all clients. The necessity of engaging in action-oriented activities to influence client's behavior so that the client resolves his problems is the underlying rationale for behavioral counseling. The basic tenet is that behavior is a function of its antecedents. The counselor helps the client change the way in which he responds to certain situations which elicit his unwanted behavior so that the client may function in the effective manner he desires. (KJ)

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Rationale for Behavioral Counseling

Keith R. LeVake

Introduction

The term "counseling" is used by a wide variety of professions. There are beauty counselors, investment counselors, real estate counselors, and grief counselors, as well as various kinds of psychological counselors. The outgrowth of the wide usage of this term is that there is considerable confusion as to what actually constitutes counseling. Even our special field is not spared this confusion; for in school counseling any number of definitions are available. Leona Tyler (1961) states the problem most explicitly when she says, "Counseling is one of those words that everybody understands but no two people seem to understand in precisely the same way (p. 1)." The extent of these differences in understanding is illustrated by the fact that I have, with very little searching, been able to find and duplicate some thirty-five or forty definitions of counseling which I use to discuss the nature of counseling with my students. Interestingly enough, even though there are differences in these definitions, the one theme nearly all of them have in common is that counseling is seen as some kind of a helping process.

The question immediately arises in my mind, "What constitutes help?" in the counseling sense of the word. To me this is a crucial question because the manner in which the counselor answers it will

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CG 005 654

make a difference in how he understands his role and thus how he will practice. This will, in turn, determine the quality of help offered. Perhaps quoting three or four descriptions of counseling will assist in pointing out what I think is basic to the question of "help?" In an often quoted definition, Gustad (1953) says,

Counseling is a learning-oriented process, carried on in a simple, one-to-one social environment in which a counselor, professionally competent in relevant psychological skills and knowledge, seeks to assist the client by methods appropriate to the latter's need and within the context of the total personnel program, to learn more about himself, to learn how to put such understanding into effect in relation to more clearly perceived, realistically defined goals to the end that the client may become a happier and more productive member of his society (p. 17).

In his early 1942 book Rogers states,

Effective counseling consists of a definitely structured permissive relationship which allows the client to gain an understanding of himself to a degree which enables him to make positive steps in the light of his new orientation (p. 3).

Later in a symposium on control of behavior, Rogers (1955) clearly says, "In client-centered therapy, we are deeply engaged in the prediction and influencing of behavior, or even the control of behavior (p. 1063). E. G. Williamson (1958) writes,

Counseling is a peculiar type of relatively short-term human relationship between a 'mentor' with some considerable experience in problems of human development, on one hand, and a 'learner', on the other hand, who faces certain clearly or dimly perceived difficulties in his efforts to achieve self-controlled and self-manipulated forward moving development (p. 521).

Finally, in the existential view, Rollo May (1958) writes,

The aim of therapy is that the patient experience his existence as real. The purpose is that he becomes aware of his existence fully,

which includes becoming aware of his potentialities and becoming able to act on the basis of them (p. 85).

Read carefully; notice the words, "learning-oriented", "learn", "changing", "behavior", "mentor", "learner", and "act on". In each of the definitions somehow the idea is stated or clearly implied that receiving help involves acquiring knowledge and skills, and changes and growth in ways of behavior. Or stated another way, counseling help is a learning-oriented experience the goal of which is to affect behavior.

If we can agree temporarily to this working description of counseling, I would like to discuss how the behavioral approach fulfills the requirements of an effective helping relationship.

Role of the Counselor

It seems to me that if counseling can be described as a learning-oriented experience, it logically follows: (1) that the counselor should be knowledgeable in the principles of learning and their application, (2) that he must play a very active role applying his knowledge in the counseling process, and (3) that an extremely important and legitimate object of his attention and understanding is the clients' overt behavior.

This elementary exercise in logic tends to imply somehow that the counselor's role is "directive" in nature; indeed it is just that. We are in the business of influencing behavior and this necessitates that the counselor's role be directive. In the past, this word has

been, and still may be, a problem for many practicing school counselors because a commonly held perception of the role of the counselor is that it is a passive one in which the primary, if not sole, function of the counselor is to provide the proper atmosphere and that it is the exclusive responsibility of the client to provide all the skills and capabilities to work through his problems. Once he has worked them through and gained insight within the counseling climate, the client will go out of the counselor's office and act upon his environment in a more self-actualizing way. Carl Rogers (1951) clearly states that this is a misconception of his approach which has led to considerable failure in counseling,

. . . Hence, the counselor who plays a merely passive role; a listening, may be of assistance to some clients who are desperately in need of emotional catharsis, but by and large his results will be minimal, and many clients will leave both disappointed in their failure to receive help and disgusted with the counselor for having nothing to offer (p. 27).

Furthermore, if we refer to the psychology of learning, upon which a significant part of counseling is ultimately based, we find that generalization and transfer do not occur at a high level unless understandings and skills are acquired with that purpose in mind and reinforcement is present.

The rather low level of effective change taken from the typical counseling relationship out into the client's everyday world was most vividly demonstrated to me when I was counseling a ninth grade girl named Donna. I listened to her talk for the better part of a school year. During that time I responded with "uh-uh", "I understand" and

"you feel" (all the time thinking, "My practicum supervisor would really be proud of me"). We had a so-called, "good relationship" and she talked about many of her inner most thoughts. The next year, Donna went to another counselor and said, "I talked with Mr. LeVake last year and he just sat and soaked it up." And that is just what I did. I acted like a big sponge and never offered her anything.

Undoubtedly, some carry-over does occur, but I would suspect, as do other behavioral counselors (Bandura, 1961), that a large part of the transfer can be explained from the point-of-view that the counselor is unknowingly using many of his verbalizations to selectively reinforce certain behavior patterns which he wants to promote. The effectiveness of such unconscious use of principles of learning as reinforcement can be readily observed in the classroom when a smiling student conditions the instructor to lecture only to him or when in everyday-life mothers, who are anxious about little old men, condition their daughters to be afraid of Santa Claus.

The point of these last few statements is that I do not consider that the question of direction and control should become a major problem for practicing counselors. In any interpersonal relationship people influence and control one another. The counseling relationship is no exception; Bandura (1961) and Krumboltz (1965) refer to a number of studies which give evidence that counselors do exercise control over their clients.

Basic Issues

The counselor who sees himself as a true helper and genuinely perceives counseling as a unique relationship designed to help young people to ultimately become more self-actualized, achieve self-realization, grow into a more fully functioning person, fulfill self-competence, or simply to become, faces much more basic issues when he seeks to help another person than whether or not he is labeled "directive" or just how active he should be in counseling and still be classified as client-centered.

Robert Carkhuff (1969), in the introduction to his new little book entitled Helping and Human Relationships, has expressed the more important basic issues most clearly and precisely. He calls them "the 3 R's of a helping relationship."

The first issue is the right of the counselor to intervene in the life of another. When a young person seeks help in some area of his life in which he is functioning ineffectively, his expectation is that the counselor can help him live more effectively. He assumes that the counselor himself is functioning at a satisfactory level and if given the same situation he would come up with a satisfactory solution. In other words, the counselor would behave appropriately. If this is the case, Carkhuff believes the issue of the right of intervention is not a problem. Without further elaboration we can consider the second and third "R's" which I want to stress in relation to our topic of behavioral counseling.

The counselor, having intervened in the life of another person, is committed to offering real help and thus, faces the issue of responsibility. That is, in terms of the goals he and the client have established, his responsibility is to do whatever is necessary to accomplish these goals. In his efforts to help the counselor should not be bound by any single approach or any generalized goal, but rather by the ethical standards of his profession, his evaluation of his competence, his personal value-orientation and the considerations of the institution in which he works and to which he subscribes.

Within the above considerations the counselor must now consider the third "R", his role. The effective counselor plays a different role for each different client and his problem. This helping role is determined in terms of doing all the counselor can that benefits the client. This means it is inadequate for the counselor to assume that for every client his role is only to provide a non-threatening, warm, nonjudgmental atmosphere and to be a good listener so as to promote insight (Krumboltz, 1969).

The essence of the "3 R's" is that the counselor who wants to help must truly accept that he is an agent of change and that the growth of his client depends not only upon his sensitivity to his internal and external world, but also upon his ability to act upon the discriminations he makes (Carkhuff, 1969). Counseling help is

a two phase process. Adrian van Kaam (1962) makes this point,

It is the aim of counseling to assist the person in regaining his freedom in these areas by creating insight into the meanings he attributes to these situations, by starting the extinction of the responses which the counselee--after gaining insight--no longer likes to retain, and by the conditioning of other responses corresponding to his new free evaluation of reality (p. 403).

A Rationale

I expect that some behaviorists may express the point-of-view that a warm, accepting relationship is not essential to effective counseling. Although I do not subscribe to this belief, I do recognize that there will be some counseling success because the principles of learning continue to operate. However, this approach seems to suffer from the same limitations as do the approaches which say relationship is everything because it is an incomplete counseling approach. To be most effective the helping process must incorporate both helping the client know himself in a good Rogerian way of being warm, accepting and empathic and what Carkhuff (1969) describes as "action-oriented activities". These are activities which increase the client's repertoire of responses to his life concerns so that they are less problematical that he may live more effectively.

Leonard Fielding (1968) has developed a short list of statements he has entitled, "Fielding's Laws of Applied Therapeutics." Although these laws were intended to be facetious, each one holds something of value for consideration in counseling. The fourth law is particularly appropriate here because it very effectively

expresses the need for action-oriented activities in counseling. It states, "If a student exhibits behavior which is obnoxious, unwanted and undesirable, "understanding" why the behavior occurs makes it just as obnoxious, unwanted and undesirable."

The necessity of engaging in action-oriented activities to influence client's behavior so that the client resolves his problems is the underlying rationale for behavioral counseling. The basic tenant is that behavior is a function of its antecedents. It arises in response to some form of internal or external stimulation. These past experiences result in individual behavior patterns termed habits. Ordinarily, when habits fail to meet an individual's needs or attain his goals, they diminish or undergo extinction because they are unadaptive. Sometimes, however, maladaptive behavior continues even though it is not, at first glance, satisfying. This is when young people often seek counseling. In behavioral counseling, counselors purposely apply known principles of learning to overcome these persistent behavior patterns (Wolpe and Lazarus, 1966). That is, the counselor helps the client change the way in which he responds to certain situations which elicit his unwanted behavior.

Wolpe and Lazarus (1966) and others (Michael and Meyerson, 1962) have discussed thoroughly the methods of changing behavior which are derived from learning theory, and I refer you to their works. I only want to mention that there is a wide variety of methods employed to change behavior. These include counterconditioning techniques

such as verbalization of anxiety, reciprocal inhibition, assertive training, relaxation instruction, desensitization and aversive conditioning. Extinction procedures in which learned responses are repeated without reinforcement until they discontinue is another method. Positive reconditioning methods including operant and classical conditioning and discrimination learning is often employed by the behavioral counselor.

The goal of these methods is to change behavior: learn new ways of behaving, unlearn old ways of behaving or modify certain ways of behaving, so that the client may function in the effective manner he desires.

Summary

In a way of summary, I want to relate several questions which always seem to come up sooner or later when I discuss behavioral counseling with my students and colleagues. I expect others have answered these in the literature but, nevertheless, let me respond.

The first question is something like, "Yes, but aren't you dealing just with symptoms?" What is it that gets you into trouble with yourself and others? It is your behavior. I will agree that there are events going on within each individual; events called thoughts, feelings, emotions and understandings to name a few. We can and do make fairly trustworthy inferences about those events, but we always make them from the way a person behaves. It is what he says and does that most obviously causes concern and from that we infer emotional difficulties.

A companion question to the first is, "Because you haven't dealt with the underlying problem doesn't it reveal itself again in some other way?" No. Why should a problem present itself in another form? If a client acquires a new set of behavior which satisfy his needs or achieves his goals; thus resolving his problem, why should he go to all the extra work of developing another set of unadaptive behaviors which will make him unhappy. It is not practical and research does not indicate that it happens (Bandura, 1961).

The following question is, "But don't you think it is how a person feels that is important?" Yes, I think it is extremely important how an individual feels. The real question is, "Which comes first, the feeling or the behavior?" I think it can be argued legitimately either way. A person feels bad and acts badly or he acts badly and feels bad. For example, a person has a cyclic behavior pattern of self-doubt-anxiety-doing poorly on tests. Some may say that the person does poorly on the test because he first had feelings of self-doubt. Or it may be said that sometime previously the person performed poorly on a test. This led to feelings of anxiety and made him doubt his abilities. In other words, there is more than one place for a counselor to intervene and get on the merry-go-round. I prefer to enter at the phase of poor behavior.

The final question goes, "You have only solved one problem. Doesn't the client have to come back to learn a new solution to each new problem?" No, not any more than might be expected from passage

of time after any kind of counseling. The principle of generalization is purposely employed. By analogy, if a student learns that $1 + 1 + 1 + 1$ is the same as 4×1 , he soon learns that $2 + 2 + 2 + 2$ is the same as 4×2 and so on until he generalizes the principle of multiplication to frequencies of numbers. The same is true of other behavior. If a person gets rewarded for behaving in an adaptive way in one situation, it will be more probable that he will act that way again in similar situations and so on.

These questions serve to emphasize that in behavioral counseling behavior is the problem and thus it is the most appropriate object of the helping relationship. Thus, the rationale is summarized by John Krumboltz (1965), "Counseling consists of whatever ethical activities a counselor undertakes in an effort to help the client engage in those types of behavior which will lead to a resolution of the client's problem (p. 383).

To the degree that it can assess the extent which application of scientific techniques help the client reach his goal, counseling is behavioral (Krumboltz and Thoreson, 1969), and I believe, has faced and resolved the critical issues of a helping relationship.

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